



8-25-1880

Some Alaska Notes. Dull Times at Sitka and Fort Wrangel-Indians Turned Smugglers. (From Our Special Correspondent.) Fort Wrangel, August 14, 1880.

John Muir

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/jmb>

Recommended Citation

Muir, John, "Some Alaska Notes. Dull Times at Sitka and Fort Wrangel-Indians Turned Smugglers. (From Our Special Correspondent.) Fort Wrangel, August 14, 1880." (1880). *John Muir: A Reading Bibliography by Kimes*. 146.
<https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/jmb/146>

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the John Muir Papers at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in John Muir: A Reading Bibliography by Kimes by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact mgibney@pacific.edu.

SOME ALASKA NOTES.

Dull Times at Sitka and Fort Wrangel— Indians Turned Smugglers.

[FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.]

FORT WRANGEL, Alaska, August 14, 1880.

I am back in my old quarters here, that I left last December, and kindly and familiar everything hereabout seems. The glassy water; the lovely evergreen islands; the Indians with their canoes and their baskets and blankets and berries; the jet ravens, prying and flying about the streets and spruce trees, and the bland, hushed atmosphere brooding tenderly over all.

We arrived here early on the morning of the 8th of this month by the steamer California, and the noise of our cannon and whistle was barely sufficient to awaken the sleepy town. The morning shout of one good rooster was the first, the only evidence of life and health that we could get in all the place. Fort Wrangel is very dull at present from a business point of view. The Cassiar gold mines, on which its chief dependence is laid, are being rapidly exhausted; and though the civil war that was in progress when I left here last winter is ended, as well as the later war, between the Hootchenos and Stickines, much of the Indian trade in furs has been driven away, thus greatly increasing the depression due to the failing of the mines.

On the 19th we arrived at Sitka, and here too, business matters seemed dull, though far less so than in Wrangel. The stoppage of the quartz mill belonging to the Alaska Gold and Silver Mining Company, owing to unfavorable results obtained from a few months' trial, has of course greatly lessened the activity prevailing here last December. It is hoped that a larger mill will be built, that will enable the Company to work the low-grade rock of the Stewart mine at a fair profit. Prospecting is still being vigorously pushed among the adjacent mountains. One miner, Mr. Halsey, is said to be making good wages by crushing quartz in a large iron mortar. This rock, it is claimed, yields about \$400 gold per ton.

The Jamestown, lying here, makes, of course, some little stir in the business of the place. Commander Beardslee is evidently a man with a conscience, and doing the best he can with the limited means he has for both whites and Indians, and the interests of the Territory in general. With Major Morris, special agent of the Treasury Department, he intended setting out to-day on the steamer Favorite on a cruise through the inland waters to the north of here, to look after Government interests among the different tribes of Indians that inhabit this region. The Fort Simpson Indians, it seems, are actively engaged in smuggling British goods into this portion of the Territory, and carrying away large quantities of valuable furs; also the Hoona Indians about Cross Sound complain that those same smugglers are killing their sea otters. Last spring a party of 27 miners went through the Chilcat country over the Chilcat divide to the headwaters of the Yukon. They have not yet been heard from. The party was accompanied by a number of marines from the Jamestown, and thus had a good send-off under the wing of the Government. This, I believe, is the first party of whites that the warlike Chilcats have allowed to pass through their country.

On our return from Sitka the California called at Klamack, a fishing and trading station on Prince of Wales Island, for freight in the shape of canned salmon, fish oil, furs, etc. This station is located on a beautiful bay closely embosomed in the green woods—the one general bay being made up of many smaller ones, each of which would make a charming picture—lovely reaches of glassy water, a margin of yellow-green sedges and bushes, then beveled walls of spruces circling about them in beautiful lines, and snow-capped mountains in the background. How beautiful it all seemed in the sunlight, and how beautiful in the stillness of the night with the spangling stars reflected in the water.

The California is about to leave, and this short letter must thus abruptly be brought to a close. I have hired a crew of Stickine Indians, and will set out northward on the 16th in a canoe to study the glaciers and forests.

JOHN MUIR.